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ABSTRACT

This issue discusses the problems that frequently accompany involuntary job loss. The types of problems experienced by dislocated workers are discussed under these categories: emotional, family, financial, physical health, job skill obsolescence, and lack of basic academic skills. The report also presents approaches that were taken by four dislocated worker projects in the Northwest to help clients deal with these problems. These projects are described: the Mid-Willamette (Oregon) Job Council, TREE (Training and Re-employment): A Project for Laid-Off Wood Products Workers, I-WON: Idaho Workers Opportunity Network, and Project Challenge: Work Again. Project services are described, and comments from project staff are included concerning the information resources they use to help dislocated workers with the psychological, social, and skill-related problems. The National Alliance of Business Clearinghouse is recommended as a resource to answer questions about the Job Training Partnership Act and other employment-related issues. (YLB)

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DEALING WITH INVOLUNTARY JOB LOSS

Northwest Dislocated Worker Projects Address More Than Retraining and Re-employment

For the dislocated worker who is the victim of a large-scale layoff, plant closure or company reorganization, life's most pressing concern is that of finding a new job. Research with dislocated workers has revealed that they face several other problems as well--problems which are brought on by job loss and which often interfere with searching for and finding another job. These include emotional and family problems, financial problems, problems with physical health, and problems resulting from job skill obsolescence and from lack or inadequacy of basic academic skills.

Research has further shown that these problems affect dislocated workers often enough and profoundly enough that they need to be acknowledged and addressed by projects aimed at helping these people to become re-employed. The technical and practical helps provided to clients of these projects can be used to best advantage only when the dislocated worker's problems are recognized and treated.

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Understanding Worker Dislocation: NWREL's Study

The research referred to above was conducted by staff of NWREL's Education and Work Program with funding from the National Institute of Education. Beginning in 1983, Program staff undertook three activities to gather information about worker dislocation in the Northwest:

- Conducting interviews and case studies at educational and service agencies in six communities in NWREL's service region
- Surveying the opinions and experiences of dislocated workers
- Reviewing the literature on worker dislocation and unemployment

These activities produced information pertinent to the following questions:

1. What is worker dislocation and what causes it?

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2. What psycho/social problems do dislocated workers face?

3. Do some workers cope better than others with job dislocation? Why?

4. Do dislocated workers have special needs? What are they?

5. What can be done to meet these needs?

6. What exemplary programs for dislocated workers exist and what are their programmatic features?

Findings from the Education and Work Program research are presented in a September 1985 report entitled The Impact of Worker Dislocation in the Northwest: A Summary Report, by Marilyn Clark and Thomas Owens.

Problems Experienced by Dislocated Workers

In this issue of Ideas for Action in Education and Work, we will discuss the problems which frequently accompany involuntary job loss. We will then present the approaches taken by four dislocated worker projects in the Northwest to help clients deal with these problems. Included also are comments from project staff members concerning the information resources they use to help dislocated workers with these psychological, social and skill-related problems.

Emotional Problems. Although dislocated workers are generally reluctant at first to admit that their job loss has created emotional problems in their lives, research has clearly established that these problems are extremely common among them. Without attempting a detailed analysis, we will give an overview of some frequently experienced problems.

The most-often reported problem of the dislocated worker is depression. Losing one's job, even when there was nothing the worker could have done to prevent it, often results in embarrassment, loss of confidence and self-esteem, and a general feeling of helplessness. Dislocated workers may also be plagued by feelings of anger and resentment at the injustice of having their jobs taken away. Moody and often withdrawn, they may have an increased incidence in their lives of substance abuse and problems interacting with others. Other stress symptoms often noted are increased anxiety, insomnia, fatigue and physical problems.

Family Problems. In addition to the family problems brought on by the emotional stresses the dislocated worker is feeling, other family issues are likely to surface. For example, children are sometimes unable to understand the reasons for the parent's job loss and may become angry or embarrassed about it. This, in turn, can cause them to develop problems with friends or in school. Stresses can also be caused when family members are together much more than usual, or when family roles shift due to the job loss.

Financial Problems. Job loss generally brings about radical changes in the dislocated worker's financial situation. Drastically reduced financial resources can lead families to go without or put off purchasing goods and services that they would normally have, and some of these delays can result in greater expense later--as when people put off needed medical or dental treatments, household repairs or insurance payments. Further, dislocated workers are often people committed to long-term installment purchases; thus, when job loss occurs some lose their homes or struggle from month to month fearing such loss. Generally speaking, dislocated workers re-entering employment earn less than their previous wages and experience complementary reductions in benefits and pension plans.

Physical Health Problems. Research indicates that the stress of fearing unemployment and the reality of unemployment increase health risk factors. Dislocated workers are frequently characterized by lack of

exercise, loss of muscle tone, symptoms of cardiac and respiratory stress, psychosomatic complaints and increases in doctor and hospital visits. As with the other problems cited in this discussion, the physical problems experienced by dislocated workers often interfere with seeking new employment, thus exacerbating the basic problem.

Job Skill Obsolescence. Dislocated workers sometimes lack skills which can readily transfer to other occupations. More often, the dislocated worker possesses some transferable skills, but does not fully realize what the skills are or how they might apply to a new occupational area. For those whose work history is in an occupational field unlikely to resurge in the near future (e.g., the wood products industry in the Northwest), it is especially important that workers learn to identify their skills and understand how these can transfer to other areas.

Lack of Basic Academic Skills. As much as 20 percent of the dislocated worker population is functionally illiterate. This can pose a major barrier both to securing new employment and to getting maximum benefit from retraining programs. Illiteracy problems are sometimes compounded by the dislocated worker's embarrassment over the deficiency and consequent unwillingness to seek help.

The Mid-Willamette Job Council

In an interview with Joe Nelson, Workshop Coordinator for the Mid-Willamette Job Council, we learned of activities aimed at helping dislocated workers in the Oregon counties of Marion, Polk and Yamhill. Recent large-scale layoffs in the communications, food processing and wood products industries have increased the unemployment rate in this area, and with it the need for support services for dislocated workers.

How does the Council's dislocated worker projects address the problems described above? First of all, Nelson agreed that these problems are very real and must be dealt with if instruction in practical job searching is to be useful. These psychological, social and skill-related problems are all acknowledged and addressed in a four-day workshop developed and delivered by Nelson.

Clients are informed that depression and anger are normal responses to their situation and are provided practical helps to deal with these moods and feelings. Examining irrational attitudes, keeping humor and play in one's life, and maintaining motivation are stressed. Participants are taught techniques for discussing issues with their families, seeking support, and understanding family dynamics.

In looking at financial issues, participants are led through a realistic analysis of the local economy and their own situation within it. They are then presented with techniques to help them plan and budget in ways that match their values and the realities of their situation. Since most dislocated workers do not become re-employed at as high a wage as they earned prior to their job loss, special attention is given to developing a realistic outlook, together with budgeting assistance in personal finances.

Workshop leaders explain the physical problems that often plague the victims of involuntary job loss, and they discuss the relationship between physical well-being and attitude. Information about diet and exercise is presented, and clients are encouraged to involve themselves in physical activities they enjoy.

Workshop participants take the California Occupational Preference System interest inventory, and Career Information System printouts are used to help determine appropriate next steps in seeking re-employment. Considerable attention is devoted to helping participants identify what job skills they possess and the occupations to which these skills are

applicable. To acquire or upgrade basic academic skills, participants can receive support to pursue their GED degree and, if appropriate, to enter retraining programs which include a focus on these skills.

Council-sponsored workshops are designed and developed using an array of information resources--local libraries, journals, popular magazines such as Psychology Today, film catalogs, university coursework, workshops, seminars and networking with others involved in dislocated worker projects.

TREE: A Project for Laid-Off Wood Products Workers

The Training and Re-Employment project (TREE) serves the victims of the wood products industry decline in Washington. TREE has offices in Longview, Raymond, Aberdeen and Cathlamet. With a goal of serving 300 dislocated workers and their families, TREE has thus far provided services to over 200 such families. A collaborative effort of the International Woodworkers of America and the Washington State Employment Security Department, TREE is directed by Randy Volkman, who provided information about the project.

The project provides both a Job Development Seminar and a Survival Workshop to help clients cope with or overcome the problems which often result from job loss. In these workshops considerable emphasis is placed on developing an open mind, being creative and setting goals. Motivational films and other enthusiasm-building techniques and materials are used.

In dealing with emotional problems, initial emphasis is on getting client acknowledgement that problems do in fact exist. Group discussion often helps individuals overcome their isolation and reluctance to discuss these problems. Inviting spouses and older children to participate in workshop activities has been effective in reducing family problems. The workshops frequently feature speakers who also provide insights and help--family therapists, drug and alcohol counselors, other social service agency personnel. In the case of serious personal or family problems, referrals are made to appropriate agencies in the community.

The financial issues commonly faced by dislocated workers and their families are addressed in several ways. TREE project workshop leaders help clients to get a realistic sense of the economy and of their own options. Attempts are made to transition people into other occupations, rather than reinforce false hopes about the future of the wood products industry. Financial counselors are among the workshop speakers provided, and those clients with pressing financial problems are referred to consumer credit counseling agencies.

Like other projects, TREE attempts to help clients identify their skills and how these might be applied in other occupations. Career exploration activities help them to decide which occupations are of interest for further investigation. To acquire or improve client's academic skills, the project provides funds so that participants can pursue their GED or community college training programs. Tuition, tutoring, testing fees, child care costs and transportation costs are among the needs paid for by the project.

Information sources used to develop project activities include social service agency directories, publications of the Employment Security Department, trade journals, other periodicals, and staff of other projects. Engaging social service agency personnel from the community to serve as speakers and instructors has proved to be an especially rich source of information supporting client needs.

I-WON: Idaho Workers Opportunity Network

In the Kellogg, Idaho area, mining cutbacks and closures have put many

people out of work. In the Boise area, workers in a variety of industries have been laid off during the past year. And in Pocatello, employees in the heavy manufacturing and railroad industries have recently fallen victim to involuntary job loss due to declining economic conditions. The Idaho Workers Opportunity Network (I-WON) works with dislocated workers in these areas under the leadership of project director, John Cantrell. I-WON is operated by the state AFL-CIO.

As with other dislocated worker projects, the main thrust of I-WON is the development of job-seeking skills. As staff of other projects have discovered, however, the development and use of these skills is much more likely if the project also attends to the personal and social problems experienced by dislocated workers and their families.

Cantrell, like other project representatives, was quick to acknowledge that project staff are not professional therapists and do not attempt to deal with deep-seated emotional and psychological problems. As such problems are encountered, referrals are made to appropriate social service agencies. Cantrell noted that most of the emotional problems of project clients are the kind which improve dramatically when the individual is given understanding, support, and a structure for dealing with the issues. Initial workshop activities have as their main purpose giving back a sense of hope to people who have lost it.

I-WON workshops stress the importance of family support for the dislocated worker. The project routinely sends a letter to client families, explaining the project purpose and activities. Families are invited to participate when the project conducts plant closure workshops. And project staff explain to family members ways they can provide support to the laid-off, job-hunting member: make the family car available, don't tie up the telephone, and avoid giving the job searcher great numbers of odd jobs to do at home during the day.

Clients are referred to agencies in the community which can provide energy assistance, food stamps and so forth, when these helps are needed. The project has limited funding which allows for the provision of cash assistance to clients in crisis situations. The project also links its clients up with consumer credit counselors, if necessary.

Information is provided on how to maintain physical health and on the kinds of health problems to watch out for when under stress. The importance of structure is emphasized. As with other areas, referrals are made when serious health problems are noted.

Most dislocated workers, says Cantrell, are either ignorant about the transferability of their job skills, or they underrate their abilities, or both. Thus, workshop activities are aimed at helping them clarify their skills and see the applicability of these to other occupations. Retraining is provided as appropriate, although most often the dislocated worker neither wishes to enter a retraining program, nor can he or she realistically afford to spend the time usually required by such programs. The project also has funds to meet the moving costs of clients who are relocating, in cases where these clients can confirm that a job awaits them in the new location.

To upgrade basic academic skills, I-WON clients are strongly encouraged to enter a GED program, if appropriate, or a vocational education program, if that more closely meets their needs. For either option, the project is prepared to provide child care and transportation costs, as well as the costs of classes, tutoring and materials.

The I-WON project draws upon many information resources to meet client needs. A major source cited was national and regional conferences that include JTPA Title III dislocated worker projects and panels sharing their exemplary projects. Conference participants provide a rich source of

networking as they bring together JTPA professionals, private industry council members from both the public and private sector, representatives from state job training coordinating councils, elected officials, and representatives from education, vocational rehabilitation, and other agencies. Other sources cited include Job Service, libraries and bookstores, the Career-Life Planning Clearinghouse, and guides such as Richard Bolles' What Color is Your Parachute? Need cited by Cantrell is for a more simple and straightforward instrument for job skills identification, as many of the available instruments are seen as being too long and complex to be really useful.

Project Challenge: Work Again

The Montana AFL-CIO operates this project, which serves dislocated workers from the mining, wood products, smelting, railroad, agricultural and meat-cutting industries. By the end of 1985, Project Challenge will have served 650 people during this calendar year. The project has a component designed to serve the disabled dislocated worker, as well as the much larger project component which services dislocated workers in general.

Because Project Challenge's director is new on the job, information about project operations was provided by Candy Brown, Regional Coordinator for the Human Resource Development Institute (HRDI) of the National AFL-CIO. Brown provides technical assistance to project staff.

Project Challenge clients participate in an initial Community Workshop, which is followed by an intensive seven-day Dislocated Worker Workshop. Both activities deal with social, emotional and skill-related problems.

The project operates a Stress of Unemployment Workshop, which acquaints clients with common problems and helpful solutions. At the Community Workshop, representatives from various community agencies give presentations about their services--mental health, social services, alcohol and drug counseling, emotional support and spiritual guidance through contact with the clergy, and so forth. This topic receives further attention during the seven-day session.

Family members frequently participate in Community Workshop activities. In addition, Project Challenge staff work closely with agencies providing family counseling services, making referrals as appropriate. They also speak at meetings of teachers' unions, informing teachers of the way children are likely to be affected by family unemployment and providing helpful suggestions for their use.

The Rocky Mountain Occupational Safety and Health Association has developed a resource titled Unemployment Can Be Harmful to Your Health. This is used to acquaint project clients with health risks and offer ideas for overcoming them.

In the Community Workshop, considerable attention is given to the financial problems faced by dislocated workers. Bankers, home mortgage representatives, legal advisors, consumer credit representatives and others provide information and make clients aware of services available to them. In the seven-day workshop, a financial management and budgeting curriculum package developed at Utah State University specifically for dislocated workers is used with project clients, as are various materials developed by HRDI.

A booklet titled Self-Directed Job Placement contains tests and instruments to help clients identify their job skills and become aware of the transferability of those skills to other lines of work. State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee materials are also used to help workers identify their aptitudes in relation to different careers and wage scales.

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Project Challenge provides a functional literacy program which was developed by the Montana AFL-CIO. Functionally literate non-high school graduates are encouraged to pursue their GED degrees. Support services such as child care assistance, transportation and educational materials are provided for clients seeking to acquire or upgrade their academic skills.

Resources used by project staff to develop the various components are similar to those used in the other projects described, with perhaps even greater emphasis on involving community service agency personnel. Asked about information gaps, Brown remarked that the project is currently seeking to access a curriculum developed in Idaho for working with the young children of dislocated workers in the school setting. Brown also noted that information is scarce regarding dislocated agricultural workers, who are growing in number, and that more resources in this area are needed. Brown's other major observation is that an information clearinghouse on dislocated worker projects in different states would be very helpful.

A Resource

The National Alliance of Business has created the NAB Clearinghouse to answer questions about the Job Training Partnership Act and other employment-related issues. The clearinghouse tracks down and analyzes innovative training ideas and "best practices" from all over the country. NAB also produces numerous publications including Work America and "Business Currents". For information, call or write: Clearinghouse, National Alliance of Business, 1015 15th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005 (202) 289-2910.

Conclusion

There are many problems which face those dealing with involuntary job loss but creative efforts continue to put people back into productive jobs. Through networking of outstanding quality job training professionals, these leaders can merge their knowledge and successes for greater efficiency inproviding employment opportunities.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank those associated with the projects described in this newsletter for taking the time to share their knowledge and information with us. Those wishing additional information about the projects may wish to contact these representatives:

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